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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/RA LAWSON

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SUBJECT: GOI OFFICIALS LOBBIED FOR MEMBERSHIP IN MIDDLE EAST DESALINATION RESEARCH CENTER (MEDRC)

1. (U) SUMMARY. ON JULY 17, DR. CHARLES LAWSON (SPECIAL ADVISOR FOR SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS), ACCOMPANIED BY EMB OFFS, MET WITH LUCA FRATINI, DEPUTY OFFICE DIRECTOR IN THE MFA'S MIDDLE EAST BUREAU, AMBASSADOR MARIO SICA (FORMER ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO EGYPT), AND MINISTER EUGENIO CAMPO (DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT). THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING WAS TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE ITALIAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE MIDDLE EAST DESALINATION RESEARCH CENTER (MEDRC). ITALY IS INTERESTED BUT IS NOT ABLE TO MAKE A FINANCIAL COMMITMENT AT THIS TIME. SPECIFIC TRAINING PROGRAMS ASSOCIATED WITH MEDRC OBJECTIVES COULD BE CONSIDERED FOR FUNDING ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) LAWSON, A MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF MEDRC, MET WITH MFA REPRESENTATIVES TOGETHER WITH THE MEDRC'S DIRECTOR, KOUSSAI QUTEISHAT, AND MEDRC'S DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, SHANNON MCCARTHY, TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF ITALY'S JOINING MEDRC AS A FULL MEMBER BECAUSE OF STRONG ITALIAN INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE PEACE PROCESS. MEDRC IS A RESEARCH INSTITUTE WHOSE MISSION IS TO CONDUCT, FACILITATE, PROMOTE, COORDINATE, AND SUPPORT BASIC AND APPLIED RESEARCH IN WATER DESALINATION TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPORTING FIELDS. ACCORDING TO LAWSON, MEMBER STATES HAVE EACH HISTORICALLY CONTRIBUTED ONE-TIME AMOUNTS OF \$3 MILLION TO THE CENTER SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 1993. CURRENT MEMBERS INCLUDE THE UNITED STATES, JAPAN, THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, AND ISRAEL. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAS ALSO CONTRIBUTED FUNDS TO THE CENTER, BUT REMAINS AN OBSERVER, NOT A FULL MEMBER. LAWSON EMPHASIZED THAT PROJECTS, WHICH INVOLVE BOTH ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS, ARE AN IMPORTANT STEP IN CONTINUING DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES, AND DESALINATION RESEARCH HAS BEEN A VALUABLE CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION.

3. (U) GOI REPRESENTATIVES FOCUSED ON TWO ASPECTS OF THE DISCUSSION: ACTUAL ITALIAN MEMBERSHIP IN MEDRC, AND FINANCING ITALY'S MEMBERSHIP. THE ITALIANS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN THE WORK OF MEDRC, BUT ALSO CONCERNS ABOUT THE FINANCIAL COMMITMENT NECESSARY FOR MEMBERSHIP. AS THE MFA HAS UNDERGONE SERIOUS BUDGET RESTRICTIONS RECENTLY, AND ITALY HAS BEEN CONTRIBUTING TO RECONSTRUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, AFRICA AND THE BALKANS, THE FUNDS ARE JUST NOT AVAILABLE FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE SHORT TERM. HOWEVER, MFA OFFICIALS SAID THEY WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE FUTURE BECAUSE THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE PEACE PROCESS ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO THE GOI. THE DG FOR COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (C&D) WAS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT FUNDING MEMBERSHIP IN MEDRC BECAUSE THE DG HAS A SPECIFIC LIST OF TARGET COUNTRIES TO WHICH FUNDS CAN BE ALLOCATED, AND SOME MEMBERS OF MEDRC DO NOT MEET THOSE CRITERIA. LAWSON HAD MET WITH COUNSELOR GIORGIO TRABATTONI FROM THE DG C&D THE PREVIOUS DAY, WHO EXPRESSED SIMILAR FINANCIAL CONCERNS. TRABATTONI INDICATED THAT MEDRC MEMBERSHIP WOULD BE OF POTENTIAL INTEREST TO ITALY. WHILE THE QUESTION OF FULL MEMBERSHIP IS BEING DISCUSSED, HOWEVER, DG C&D ENCOURAGED MEDRC TO PASS ALONG SPECIFIC PROJECTS IN COUNTRIES WHICH DG C & D COULD POTENTIALLY FUND, ESPECIALLY TRAINING PROGRAMS WHICH COULD BE OFFERED IN ITALY.

4. (U) AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING, AMBASSADOR SICA PROMISED TO REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, AMB. SESSA, ABOUT THEIR DISCUSSIONS AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH ITALY COULD BECOME A MEMBER OF MEDRC.

5. (U) THIS CABLE WAS PREPARED BY ROME SCI INTERN LISA GEORGE.  
SEMBLER

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